

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 SP-02 STR-04 TRSE-00

LAB-04 SIL-01 SAM-01 OMB-01 AGR-05 NSC-05 SS-15 PA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0557

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EGEN, UK, EEC

SUBJECT: EC MEMBERSHIP: COMMONS APPROVES REFERENDUM BILL

REF: LONDON 5500

SUMMARY: HOUSE OF COMMONS APRIL 24 APPROVED EC REFEREN-
DUM BILL WITH ONLY ONE MAJOR CHANGE FROM ORIGINAL PRO-
POSAL -- VOTE TALLY WILL BE BY COUNTY RATHER THAN BY NA-
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TION AS WHOLE -- KEEPING TO TIMETABLE WHICH WILL PERMIT

JUNE 5 BALLOT. GOVERNMENT SUCCESSFULLY WITHSTOOD REPEATED OPPOSITION AND LABOR BACKBENCH ATTEMPTS TO AMEND IMPORTANT PROVISIONS IN VOTING WHICH ONLY ROUGHLY FOLLOWED PARTY LINES. BILL NOW MOVES TO HOUSE OF LORDS WHICH IS NOT EXPECTED TO DELAY PASSAGE. END SUMMARY.

1. COMMONS, SITTING AS COMMITTEE, APRIL 22 AND 23 REVIEWED AMENDMENTS TO REFERENDUM BILL. GOVERNMENT INVOKED "RUNNING" THREE LINE WHIP DURING MARATHON SITTINGS OF COMMITTEE STAGE, SUCCESSFULLY DEFEATING ALL OPPOSITION AND PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP) BACKBENCH AMENDMENTS BY SUBSTANTIAL MARGINS. ONLY EXCEPTION WAS PLP BACKBENCH MOTION TO TALLY REFERENDUM BY COUNTIES AND REGIONS (SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND) RATHER THAN BY SINGLE NATION-WIDE COUNT AS ORIGINALLY PROPOSED. GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, PERMITTED FREE VOTE ON THIS QUESTION (REFTEL). ONLY OTHER SIGNIFICANT AMENDMENT WAS GOVERNMENT-BACKED CHANGE PERMITTING MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES TO VOTE BY MAIL. UNSUCCESSFUL AMENDMENTS INCLUDED: GRANTING OF VOTE TO OVERSEAS CITIZENS OTHER THAN MILITARY; INCREASED FUNDS FOR CAMPAIGN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS; TALLY BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY; AND RESTRICTIONS ON HMG REFERENDUM INFORMATION OFFICES.

2. REFERENDUM BILL WAS GIVEN THIRD READING AND PASSED BY 180 TO 41 LATE APRIL 24. LIBERALS, SOME TORIES AND OTHERS JOINED GOVERNMENT ON FINAL DIVISION. TIMELY COMMONS ACTION LEAVES GOVERNMENT RIGHT ON SCHEDULE FOR JUNE 5 REFERENDUM. BILL NOW MOVES TO HOUSE OF LORDS WHERE IT NOW APPEARS NO EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO BLOCK THIS UNPRECEDENTED LEGISLATION.

3. COMMENT: WILSON GOVERNMENT CAN CLEARLY TAKE SOME SATISFACTION IN TIMELY PASSAGE OF REFERENDUM BILL, THOUGH MUCH OF ACTUAL CREDIT MUST GO TO CONSERVATIVE PARTY WHICH PURPOSELY ESCHEWED MAJOR ATTEMPT TO DELAY PASSAGE. ONE VETERAN PLP WHIP TOLD EMBOFF THAT VOTING ON VARIOUS AMENDMENTS WAS VIRTUALLY UNCONTROLLED AND SURPRISING, DESPITE PLP THREE LINE WHIP. NEVER IN HIS EXPERIENCE HAD PLP VOTING BEEN SO FLUID AND UNPREDICTABLE. ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MENT WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO SEE SINGLE NATION-WIDE REFERENDUM TALLY, IT HAD EARLIER DECIDED TO AVOID CONFRONTATION ON THIS HIGHLY CONTENTIOUS ISSUE BY ALLOWING FREE VOTE (REFTEL). VIRTUALLY ALL OBSERVERS NOW EXPECT REFERENDUM BILL TO MOVE THROUGH HOUSE OF LORDS WITHOUT SERIOUS DELAY, THOUGH LORD GEORGE-BROWN CONTINUES TO MAKE THREATENING NOISES. IN ABSENCE OF TORY DECISION TO BLOCK THIS LEGISLATION, HOWEVER, ANY SUCH EFFORTS WILL COME TO

NAUGHT. ONE INDEX OF LORDS' ATTITUDE WAS ITS APRIL 22
ENDORSEMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION TO CONTINUE EC
MEMBERSHIP BY OVERWHELMING 261 TO 20 MARGIN. GIVEN PRE-
VAILING PRO-EC SENTIMENT, IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT UP-
PER HOUSE WOULD RISK TRYING TO DELAY REFERENDUM.

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